

Message Text

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ACTION AGRE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6041

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

UNCLAS TUNIS 1691

PASS AGRICULTURE/FAS FOR NOVOTNY FROM KEN MURRAY USDA

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAGR, TS

SUBJ: TUNISIAN GRAIN SITUATION

1. (BEGIN SUMMARY) TUNISIAN 1977 GRAIN CROP AT CRITICAL POINT. AFTER GETTING OFF TO A GOOD START WITH ADEQUATE AUTUMN MOISTURE AND EXCELLENT PLANTING CONDITIONS, A DROUGHT BEGAN IN EARLY JANUARY. SINCE THEN CROP HAS SUFFERED STRESS FROM LACK OF MOISTURE AND MORE THAN AVERAGE SUN AND TEMPERATURES. WHEAT AND BARLEY OUTPUT ALREADY REDUCED BY AS MUCH AS 30 PERCENT FROM PLANNED PRODUCTION LEVELS OF 950,000 METRIC TONS AND 300,000 METRIC TONS RESPECTIVELY. FIELD SURVEY IN MAJOR GRAIN PRODUCING AREA CONFIRMED PESSIMISTIC OUTLOOK RELAYED BY VARIOUS SOURCES IN TUNIS. (END SUMMARY).

2. IF RAINS NOT FORTHCOMING IN NEXT WEEK OR 10 DAYS, PRODUCTION COULD BE REDUCED FURTHER 10 PERCENT. RAINS MUCH AFTER THAT POINT WOULD BE TOO LATE FOR CROP TO RECOVER. IN FACT, MAY RAINS AS OCCURRED LAST SEASON WOULD ONLY FURTHER REDUCE GRAIN OUTPUT THROUGH INCREASED INCIDENCE OF RUST.

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OUTLOOK IS POOREST CROP IN SIX YEARS.

3. AT THIS POINT, ASSUMING NEEDED RAINS OCCUR IN NEXT 10 DAYS, CROP ESTIMATED AS FOLLOWS, IN THOUSAND TONS, (LAST YEAR IN PARENS): DURUM 540 (700), BREAD WHEAT 125 (180); BARLEY 210 (2709). TOTAL GRAIN CROP WOULD THUS TOTAL 875,000 TONS AGAINST

PLANNED LEVEL OF 1,250,000 TONS AND ANNUAL CONSUMPTION REQUIREMENT OF ABOUT 1,500,000 TONS.

4. EARLIER PLANTED GRAIN CROP IN SOUTH ALREADY IN DISASTER STATE. THIS REGION PRODUCES ABOUT ONE FIFTH OF GRAIN CROP, MAINLY BARLEY FOR DIRECT HUMAN CONSUMPTION. (IMPORTED CORN IS ONLY USED FOR ANIMAL FEEDING PURPOSES).

5. END OF SEASON (JULY 1, 1977) STOCKS HELD BY CEREALS OFFICE WILL PROBABLY EQUAL ABOUT TWO MONTHS NEEDS OF COMMERCIAL DEMAND, I.E., ABOUT 100,000 TONS.

6. WOULD APPEAR THAT IMPORT REQUIREMENTS FOR 1977/78 (EVEN ASSUMING NEEDED RAINS) CAN BE PROJECTED AT ESTIMATED MAXIMUM PORTS CAN HANDLE, I.E., 600,000 TONS. IMPORT BREAKDOWN COULD BE AS FOLLOWS: WHEAT 470; BARLEY 50; CORN 80. THIS ALSO ASSUMES GOT WILLINGNESS TO EXPEND SCARCE FOREIGN EXCHANGE TO MAKE THESE PURCHASES.

7. IMPORTS FOR 1976/77 ESTIMATED AS FOLLOWS (THOUSAND TONS): WHEAT 300 OF WHICH 125 US, 125 ARGENTINE AND 50 EC AND CANADIAN; BARLEY 25; CORN 80. ACTUAL IMPORTS OF WHEAT FROM JULY 1, 1976 TO JANUARY 31, 1977, TOTALLED 185,000 TONS OF WHICH 138,000 BREAD WHEAT AND 47,000 DURUM.
MULCAHY

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